

National News

By Jim Robson

Not One Nation Under Wages

One fact of life is that wage rates* by occupation vary throughout the United States. Engineers receive a higher hourly wage in California than they do in Mississippi. Computer-related occupations enjoy some of their highest wages in the northeastern United States. Differences like these can be found across all occupations and all regions. Wage variations across the United States are primarily influenced by local conditions such as the cost-of-living, the supply and demand of labor, the degree of unionization, the industrial mix, and the vitality of the overall economy.

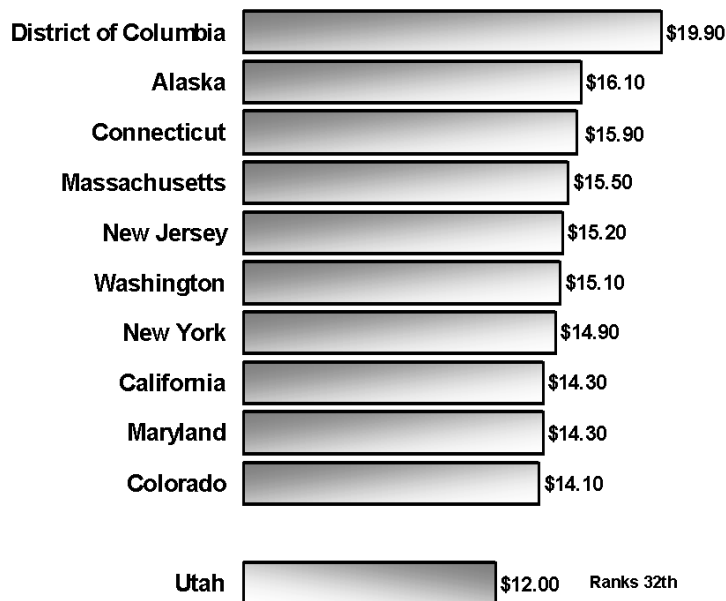
Utah is known as a state with lower-than-average wages. Is this true? In most occupations it is true. But what if we look at median wages instead of average wages? After all, averages can be

skewed by extremes. Using the median measurement eliminates this effect. In a ranking of all states and the District of Columbia, Utah's median wage of \$12.00 ranks 32nd out of 51 (see graph).

Utah's wages, and all areas' wages, are what they are because that's what works in that particular market. The bottom line is Utah's wages work for Utah. If they don't, the market will make adjustments accordingly.

*Wage rates come from the Occupational Employment Statistics survey. The reference period was the 4th quarter of 2001, with data collection continuing through July 2002.

Hourly Median Wage 2001-2002 Top Ten States and Utah



Source: Utah Department of Workforce Services.

**For more information on wages
by state and occupation:**

<http://www.bls.gov/oes/2001/oessrcst.htm>